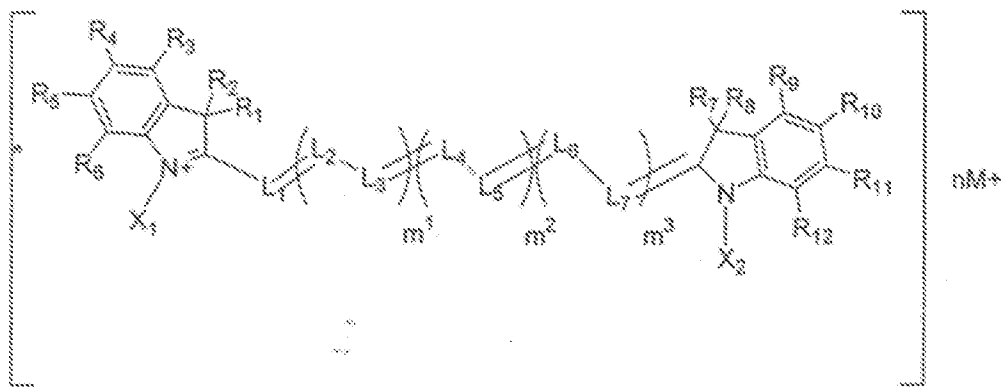


This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A near infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising a pharmaceutically acceptable injectable carrier for diagnostic imaging and a compound of the following formula or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof:



wherein

R¹, R², R⁷, and R⁸ independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted C₁-C₁₀ alkyl group or a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group; [[7]] or

R¹ and R² and/or R⁷ and R⁸ bind to each other to form a ring;

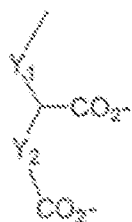
R³, R⁴, R⁵, R⁶, R⁹, R¹⁰, R¹¹ and R¹² independently represent a hydrogen atom, a substituted or unsubstituted C₁-C₆ alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group, a halogen atom, cyano group, carboxyl group, or sulfo group; [[7]]

or

two of R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , and R^{12} bind to each other to form a ring;

X^2 represents a substituted or unsubstituted C_1 - C_{15} alkyl group or a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group; ~~and~~

X^1 is a group represented by the following formula



wherein

X^1 and X^2 in total have 2 or 4 carboxyl groups;

Y^1 and Y^2 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted divalent linking group; ~~and~~

~~X^1 and X^2 in total have 2 or 4 carboxyl groups;~~

m^1 represents 0 or 1;

m^2 represents 0 or 1;

m^3 represents 0 or 1;

L^1 , L^2 , L^3 , L^4 , L^5 , L^6 , and L^7 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted methine group, provided that when two or more of the methine groups have substituents, the substituents bind to each other to form a ring;

M represents a hydrogen atom, a metal, or a quaternary ammonium salt; and

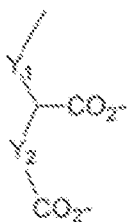
n represents an integer of 1 to 7 necessary for neutralizing charge

~~and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier for diagnostic imaging.~~

2. (Original) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1, wherein each of m^1 , m^2 , and m^3 is 1.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Previously Presented) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1, wherein X^1 and X^2 independently represent a group represented by the following formula:



wherein Y^1 and Y^2 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted divalent bond.

5. (Original) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to Claim 1, wherein at least one of R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , and R^{12} is a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group or a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group.

6. (Canceled)

7. (Canceled)
8. (Currently Amended) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to Claim 3,
wherein Y_1 represents $-(CH_2)_pCONH-$,
wherein p represents an integer of 1 to 4 and Y_2 represents $-(CH_2)-$ or $(CH_2)_2-$.
9. (Cancelled)
10. (Cancelled)
11. (Currently Amended) A method of fluorescence imaging, comprising
~~which comprises the steps~~ introducing the near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to Claim 1 into a living body, exposing said body to an excitation light, and detecting near infrared fluorescence from the contrast agent.
12. (Currently Amended) ~~A~~ The method of claim 11, which is for tumor imaging.
13. (Currently Amended) ~~A~~ The method of claim 11, which is for angiography.
14. (New) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1, wherein the pharmaceutically acceptable injectable carrier for diagnostic imaging is injectable distilled water.
15. (New) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1, wherein the pharmaceutically acceptable injectable carrier for diagnostic imaging is physiological saline.

16. (New) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1, wherein the pharmaceutically acceptable injectable carrier for diagnostic imaging is Ringer's solution.

17. (New) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to Claim 5, wherein at least one of R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , and R^{12} is a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group.

18. (New) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to Claim 5, wherein at least one of R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , and R^{12} is a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group.